

EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF CONGRESS THAT THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION SHOULD FULLY PROTECT THE FREEDOMS OF ALL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES WITHOUT DISTINCTION

SPEECH OF

HON. STENY H. HOYER

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2006

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I strongly support this important Resolution offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), urging the Russian Federation to fully protect the freedoms of all religious communities without distinction, whether registered or unregistered, as stipulated by the Russian Constitution and international standards.

It is undoubtedly true that the Russian Federation has made democratic progress since the breakup of the former Soviet Union. However, there is legitimate cause for concern that Russia is backsliding on some of the most basic democratic values, including the fundamental and inalienable human right to worship God according to the dictates of one's own conscience.

As this Resolution points out, registration is critical for religious groups to fully enjoy their religious freedoms. In fact, many of the rights and privileges afforded to religious communities are contingent upon registration.

Yet, some religious communities have been unjustly denied registration or had their registration improperly terminated. Other religious communities refuse to seek registration on theological or other grounds. In addition, there have been arson attacks on unregistered Protestant churches, with little or no effective response to bring the perpetrators to justice. And, in some areas of the Russian Federation, law enforcement authorities have carried out violent actions against believers from unregistered communities peacefully practicing their faith.

These actions are counter to values that democratic society's embrace and they are simply unacceptable.

As the former Chair and Ranking Democrat on the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I am well aware of the history of religious persecution and discrimination in Russia. In fact, when I served as Chairman of the Commission, I frequently met with religious dissidents and their families in the former Soviet Union. For example, during a Congressional delegation trip in 1988, Congressman SMITH and I met with Russian Baptists at the Hotel Pulkovo in Leningrad and with Father Gleb Yakunin at his apartment in Moscow. I also met with numerous Soviet Jewish refuseniks, some of whom were prosecuted for teaching Jewish traditions and history.

This Resolution, among other things, urges the Russian Federation to ensure full protection of freedoms for all religious communities without distinction, whether registered or unregistered, and to end the harassment of unregistered religious groups by the security apparatus and other government agencies. In addition, it urges the Russian Federation to vigorously investigate acts of violence against unregistered religious communities.

Mr. Speaker, I know there is sometimes a temptation to look upon Resolutions such as

this one as mere words on paper without significant meaning. However, we know from experience that we must never underestimate the power of our democratic ideals and values.

The truth is, the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975—with its emphasis on respect for human rights—was instrumental in focusing attention on human rights abuses, including religious persecution, in the former Soviet Union. And, the attention on these abuses was such an embarrassment to the former Soviet government that it slowly, if grudgingly, began to address them.

Today, we must be no less vigilant in holding the Russian government to account for these on-going abuses.

I urge my colleagues to vote for this Resolution.

EXTENDING NORMAL TRADE RELATIONS TREATMENT TO UKRAINE

SPEECH OF

HON. HENRY A. WAXMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 8, 2006

Mr. WAXMAN. Mr. Speaker, today we have the opportunity to recognize Ukraine's great strides since its emergence from the Iron Curtain. Indeed, the "Orange Revolution" ignited by the fraudulent elections of 2004 demonstrated the commitment of the Ukrainian people to a democratic future. By graduating Ukraine from Jackson-Vanik and extending Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR), we can help consolidate the Ukrainian government's adherence to this path.

The Jackson-Vanik amendment, enacted in 1974, originally focused on free emigration, but it became a symbol for all basic human rights including political freedom, freedom from religious discrimination, and freedom for the press. While its candidacy for Jackson-Vanik graduation demonstrates Ukraine's significant progress on these issues, there are still major areas where further improvement is necessary.

Specifically, the Ukrainian government and President Yushchenko must do more to live up to their pledge to fight anti-Semitism and condemn all ethnic and religious discrimination.

Over the past several years, Ukraine's largest private university, known in Ukraine as MAUP, has become a hotbed of anti-Semitic activity. In 2005, the school hosted an anti-Zionist conference featuring white supremacist David Duke and other Holocaust deniers from around the world and its President fervently supported the President of Iran's call for the destruction of Israel. The school has published and distributed "Mein Kampf" and "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," and leading figures at the school have petitioned to bar Jewish organization in Ukraine and ban Jewish texts.

It is important that the Ukrainian government and President Yushchenko's "Our Ukraine" party have strongly condemned the university leaders. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have called the school's activities unlawful. The time has come for the government to reexamine the school's certification and prosecute those re-

sponsible for violating Ukraine's anti-incitement laws.

In addition, the government must take action to return communal religious property confiscated during the Soviet era through a standardized, timely, and transparent process.

Jackson-Vanik graduation is an important step forward in the strategic relationship between the United States and Ukraine. But it is by no means an end to the need for scrutiny of Ukraine's adherence to fundamental human rights values. As a member of the Congressional Ukraine Caucus and a co-chair of the Congressional Task Force Against Anti-Semitism, I support this legislation, but I believe it is vital that we continue pushing Ukraine in the right direction.

A TRIBUTE TO MERCEDES
DESORMEAUX NARCISSE

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 15, 2006

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of Mercedes Desormeaux Narcisse, Esq., a distinguished member of the Brooklyn community. It behooves us to pay tribute to this outstanding leader and I hope my colleagues will join me in recognizing her impressive accomplishments.

Mercedes Desormeaux Narcisse was born in Haiti and moved to Brooklyn as a teenager. From high school on, Ms. Desormeaux Narcisse was completely educated in New York. Growing up, she attended South Shore High, Tilden High, New York City Technical College and St. Joseph College.

Ms. Desormeaux Narcisse is currently the CEO and owner of Statewide Medical and Surgical Supplies Inc., located in the heart of Brooklyn. Preceding her exceptional accomplishments at Statewide, she was in charge of medical and surgical supplies for over 10 years. In addition, Ms. Desormeaux Narcisse is a registered Nurse and worked in the profession of home care, emergency room/trauma, neurology, and renal/oncology for over 15 years. In that time she was employed at several major hospitals in Queens and Brooklyn.

Ms. Desormeaux Narcisse holds extensive certificates for Orthotic fitting, ACLS, Chemotherapy, Peritoneal Dialysis, HIV Therapy, Wound Care, Infection Control and non-violent crisis intervention.

Mercedes Desormeaux Narcisse is an active participant in the community. She is currently president of the 41st Assembly District Democratic Club, which she has been a member of for the last five years. Ms. Desormeaux Narcisse is also President of Canarsie by Choice and has played a vital role in revitalizing the Avenue L Merchant Association. Additionally she sits on various boards and committees including Community Board 18, the Lions Club, Canarsie Bridges and the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce. Of particular importance to Ms. Desormeaux Narcisse is her local "Toys for Tots" chapter called "Brooklyn Toys for Tots." Working closely with New York City Councilman, Lew Fidler, and his Chief of Staff, Bryan Lee, at the 41st Assembly District Democratic Club, the Brooklyn Toys for Tots collected over 1,700 toys for the area's less fortunate children.